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ABSTRACT

Sets of photographs of male and female teachers in formal, moderate, and informal attire were rated by 100 college students on five-point scales covering ten positive teacher characteristics. The characteristics were fair, sympathetic toward student problems, knowledgeable, enthusiastic, friendly, flexible, organized, stimulating, well prepared for class, and clear. Mean scores on each of the characteristics were computed for each dress style of male or female teachers; and levels of significance for the differences between means were derived. The results suggested that student perceptions of male and female teachers' characteristics were significantly affected by the teacher's style of dress. Style of dress seemed to exert similar influences on perceptions of both male and female teachers. No one style of dress emerged as most favorable; instead, particular styles of dress caused more positive ratings of some characteristics and less positive ratings for other characteristics. Male and female teachers dressed informally were perceived as friendly and flexible, while teachers dressed formally were rated most organized. (FL)

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## SOME EFFECTS OF TEACHERS' STYLES OF DRESS

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## SOME EFFECTS OF TEACHERS' STYLES OF DRESS

Does it matter what a teacher wears to class? When asked, most teachers will offer strong intuitive opinions. Researchers, however, have so far all but totally ignored the question. This paper will seek to provide an answer which is supported by research.

### THE PROBLEM

#### Genesis of the Problem

Several years ago the author spoke with a new graduate student who described one of his class sessions in a course designed to train teaching assistants. It seems that the professor had made some recommendations regarding the clothing which a teacher should wear. Students were advised to don particular types of professional dress and told to shun informal modes of dress in order to achieve maximum ethos with their students. The new graduate assistant inquired if the author knew of any experimental evidence to support that position.

His appetite thus whetted, the author began to survey the relevant literature in search of an answer, and discovered that there is virtually no direct evidence to support this position, or any other position, with regard to the effects of a teacher's style of dress.

The author discussed this issue with his colleagues and discovered a distinct division of opinion. Some instructors were convinced that a teacher's clothes were of no importance. They argued that a "good" teacher can and should rise above what were considered to be ephemeral and tangential aspects of the teaching situation.

Others felt strongly that a teacher's style of dress was worthy of concern, but they fell into two opposing camps. Some believed that a teacher needs to maintain some distance from his students and that this can, in part, be achieved through dressing in a manner unlike the students. Other instructors believed that a teacher would be perceived more positively with the extent to which he or she was able to relate to the students and that this could, in part, be achieved through dressing in a similar manner to them.

This exploratory study grew out of these discussions.

#### Statement of the Problem

This study sought to provide answers to these questions:

1. Are students' reports of their perceptions of the characteristics of a male teacher significantly affected by his style of dress?
2. Are students' reports of their perceptions of the characteristics of a female teacher significantly affected by her style of dress?

3. Do perceptions based on dress seem to operate similarly for male and female teachers?
4. Are student perceptions most favorably affected by teachers' dress which is very informal, very formal, or between these two extremes?
5. Do perceptions of certain teacher characteristics seem to be related to particular styles of dress?

#### METHODOLOGY

Since this study was concerned only with the effects of teachers' dress, it was necessary to find a methodology which would allow that single variable to be clearly isolated and varied while holding all other variables constant. In order to achieve this condition two sets of photographs were used. One set was comprised of three photographs of a male teacher; the other was comprised of three photographs of a female teacher. In each set, the models were shown from the neck down in relatively informal, moderate, and formal attire.

A measuring instrument was employed which allowed subjects (university undergraduates) to look at the stimulus photographs and then to rate each of the perceived teachers on five-point rating scales covering ten positive characteristics of teachers. The characteristics were fair, sympathetic toward students' problems, knowledgeable, enthusiastic, friendly, flexible, organized, stimulating, well-prepared for class, and clear.

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Fifty subjects responded to the photographs of the male teacher; another fifty subjects rated the photographs of the female teacher.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Analysis of the Data

First, mean scores were computed for each dress style, separately for male and female teachers, in terms of each of the teacher characteristics which were investigated. Second, levels of significance for the differences between means were derived through the use of a t test for dependent samples.

In the pages which follow, the results of this investigation will be discussed separately for each of the ten teacher characteristics which were studied.

#### Fair

As shown in Tables I and II for the male teachers no significant difference emerged between styles A (informal) and B (moderate); however, male teachers dressed in either of these styles were judged to be more fair than a teacher dressed in style C (formal).

For females, the teacher dressed in style C (formal) was also judged to be least fair. The female teacher in style A (informal) was perceived to be most fair, and the score for style B fell between the two extremes.

Table I presents the mean scores which were derived for this characteristic.

Table I

Mean Scores of Students' Perceptions  
from the Five-Point Rating Scale  
for the Characteristic "Fair"

Teacher Sex	Dress Style A	Dress Style B	Dress Style C
M	$\bar{x}=3.42$	$\bar{x}=3.50$	$\bar{x}=2.80$
F	$\bar{x}=3.52$	$\bar{x}=2.92$	$\bar{x}=2.56$

Table II presents the values of  $t$  and the levels of significance for the differences between the mean scores for this characteristic.

Table II

Values of  $t$  for Differences Between Means  
o Dependent Samples for the  
Characteristic "Fair"

Teacher Sex	AC	P	AB	P	BC	P
M	3.78	<.001	n.s.d.		4.88	<.001
F	6.73	<.001	4.29	<.001	2.77	<.01

Discussion. As is also the case with the other characteristics, these impressions would seem to be the result of stereotypes which were formed by the students' encounters with their past teachers. It would seem then that based upon their experience these students were inclined to believe that a teacher who dresses quite formally, whether male or female, is less likely to be fair with them than a teacher who does not.

It is possible that students conceived of the informally dressed figures as closer to them in age and life style. This might have caused them to feel that they could expect greater empathy from the less formally clad teachers.

Sympathetic toward students' problems

As Table III indicates, for both male and female

teachers, style A (informal) resulted in the highest ratings for this characteristic. Teachers, whether male or female, were scored second highest when dressed in style B (moderate). Style C (formal) resulted in the lowest ratings for this characteristic.

Table III

Mean Scores of Students' Perceptions from the Five-Point Rating Scale for the Characteristic "Sympathetic toward students' problems"

Teacher Sex	Dress Style A	Dress Style B	Dress Style C
M	$\bar{x}=3.88$	$\bar{x}=3.40$	$\bar{x}=2.74$
F	$\bar{x}=3.80$	$\bar{x}=3.28$	$\bar{x}=2.60$

As shown in Table IV, the differences between means were significant in each case.

Table IV

Values of  $t$  for Differences Between Means of Dependent Samples for the Characteristic "Sympathetic toward students' problems"

Teacher Sex	AC	P	AB	P	BC	P
M	5.88	<.001	2.58	<.05	3.42	<.01
F	7.67	<.001	2.62	<.05	4.92	<.001

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Discussion. These results make sense when one remembers that most students dress in a style which is more like style A (informal) than either of the others. When perceptions are based solely on dress, it seems reasonable for people to conclude that someone who dresses in a fashion similar to their own will be more likely to comprehend and better able to relate to their problems than someone who does not.

Knowledgable

As shown in Tables V and VI, subjects' estimates of the extent to which a male teacher was knowledgable increased as the teacher's dress became more formal. The female teacher dressed in styles B (moderate) and C (formal) was judged to be more knowledgable than when dressed in style A (informal).

Table V

Mean Scores of Students' Perceptions from the Five-Point Rating Scale for the Characteristic "Knowledgable"

Teacher Sex	Dress Style A	Dress Style B	Dress Style C
M	$\bar{x}=3.18$	$\bar{x}=3.84$	$\bar{x}=4.28$
F	$\bar{x}=3.14$	$\bar{x}=3.70$	$\bar{x}=3.78$

As Table VI shows, the differences between means were significant for all the comparisons except that between styles B (moderate) and C (formal) for the female teacher.

Table VI

Values of *t* for Differences Between Means of  
Dependent Samples for the Characteristic  
"Knowledgable".

Teacher Sex	AC	P	AB	P	BC	P
M	-8.56	<.001	-5.35	<.001	-3.96	<.001
F	-4.33	<.001	-4.07	<.001	n.s.d.	

Discussion. It may be that subjects' guesses about the age of the various teachers entered into their evaluations. One subject confided that when he saw the teacher dressed in style A (informal) he envisioned a graduate assistant. Style B (moderate) he associated with a new assistant professor. Style C (formal) caused him to think of a full professor. If other subjects operated under similar notions then one would expect the most formally dressed teachers to be perceived as most knowledgable.

#### Enthusiastic

As shown in Tables VII and VIII, male teachers dressed in style A (informal) and style B (moderate) were not perceived to be significantly different. The male teacher dressed in style C (formal) was judged to be least enthusiastic.

For female teachers, one dressed in style A (informal) was judged to be the most enthusiastic, style B (moderate) was second, and style C (formal) produced the lowest ratings for enthusiasm.

Table VII

Mean Scores of Students' Perceptions from  
the Five-Point Rating Scale for the  
Characteristic "Enthusiastic"

Teacher Sex	Dress Style A	Dress Style B	Dress Style C
M	$\bar{x}=3.60$	$\bar{x}=3.68$	$\bar{x}=2.92$
F	$\bar{x}=3.96$	$\bar{x}=3.30$	$\bar{x}=2.66$

As Table VIII indicates, all differences were significant except that between styles A (informal) and B (moderate) for the male teacher.

Table VIII

Values of  $t$  for Differences Between Means of  
Dependent Samples for the Characteristic  
"Enthusiastic"

Teacher Sex	AC	P	AB	P	BC	P
M	2.74	<.01	n.s.d.		5.26	<.001
F	7.00	<.001	3.58	<.001	3.75	<.001

Discussion. Perhaps students judged the formally dressed teachers as least enthusiastic because they felt that one who seems to be reserved is less likely to display a lively interest. Possibly a notion of the teachers age entered into the evaluations. Students may have felt, based upon their past teachers, that as one becomes older he is less likely to

display vivid enthusiasm.

Friendly

As shown in Table IX, male and female teachers received the highest scores for this characteristic when dressed in style A (informal). The second highest scores were obtained by those dressed in style B (moderate). Male and female teachers dressed in style C (formal) were judged to be least friendly.

Table IX

Mean Scores of Students' Perceptions from the Five-Point Rating Scale for the Characteristic "Friendly"

Teacher Sex	Dress Style A	Dress Style B	Dress Style C
M	$\bar{x}=4.06$	$\bar{x}=3.72$	$\bar{x}=2.72$
F	$\bar{x}=4.16$	$\bar{x}=3.42$	$\bar{x}=2.74$

As Table X shows, the difference for males between styles A (informal) and B (moderate) was not significant. The differences were significant for all other comparisons.

Table X

Values of t for Differences Between Means of  
Dependent Samples for the Characteristic  
"Friendly"

Teacher Sex	AC	P	AB	P	BC	P
M	8.62	<.001	n.s.d.		7.30	<.001
F	9.06	<.001	4.83	<.001	4.46	<.001

Discussion. Perhaps teachers, whether consciously or not, by the degree to which their dress differs from that of their students, indicate the extent to which they are willing to discuss matters not entirely related to the purpose of the class.

Possibly the most formally dressed teacher was judged to be least friendly because as a teacher seems to be less and less like the students, they are less and less likely to approach that teacher with personal matters.

#### Flexible

As Table XI shows, for both male and female teachers, those dressed in style A (informal) were judged to be most flexible, those in style B (moderate) were second, and those dressed in style C were judged to be least flexible.

Table XI  
Mean Scores of Students' Perceptions from  
the Five-Point Rating Scale for the  
Characteristic "Flexible"

Teacher Sex	Dress Style A	Dress Style B	Dress Style C
M	$\bar{x}=4.10$	$\bar{x}=3.42$	$\bar{x}=2.54$
F	$\bar{x}=4.12$	$\bar{x}=3.16$	$\bar{x}=2.46$

As Table XII indicates, for each comparison the difference between mean scores was significant.

Table XII  
Values of t for Differences Between Means of  
Dependent Samples for the Characteristic  
"Flexible"

Teacher Sex	AC	P	AB	P	BC	P
M	6.61	<.001	3.89	<.001	5.39	<.001
F	9.88	<.001	5.68	<.001	5.19	<.001

Discussion. It is possible that the students responded this way because their notion of a stereotypic uniform for a college teacher comes closest to the dress of the style C (formal) teacher. Perhaps they felt that as teachers departed from that notion, those teachers were demonstrating greater individualism, tolerance of divergence, and flexibility. Of course, it is quite possible that a formally dressed

instructor could be quite flexible, or that an informally dressed instructor might be extremely rigid. Nonetheless, to the extent to which dress influences perceptions, it seems that an instructor will more likely be perceived to be flexible if his dress is informal.

Organized

As shown in Table XIII, male and female teachers who dressed in style A (informal) were judged to be least organized, those in style B (moderate) scored second, and those in style C (formal) were judged to be most organized.

Table XIII  
Mean Scores of Students' Perceptions from  
the Five-Point Rating Scale for the  
Characteristic "Organized"

Teacher Sex	Dress Style A	Dress Style B	Dress Style C
M	$\bar{x}=2.64$	$\bar{x}=3.82$	$\bar{x}=4.40$
F	$\bar{x}=2.70$	$\bar{x}=3.76$	$\bar{x}=4.10$

As indicated in Table XIV, the difference between means was found to be significant for every comparison.

Table XIV

Values of *t* for Differences Between Means of  
Dependent Samples for the Characteristic  
"Organized"

Teacher Sex	AC	P	AB	P	BC	P
M	-8.84	<.001	-7.71	<.001	-4.32	<.001
F	-10.22	<.001	-9.45	<.001	-2.40	<.05

Discussion. Perhaps as a teacher increases the formality of his dress he is more apt to be perceived as aligned with students' perceptions of an older teacher, who, as a result of his greater experience, will more likely appear as well organized.

#### Stimulating

This characteristic is the only one of the ten for which the significant results showed a difference in the ranking of males and females. As may be seen in Tables XV and XVI, the male teacher dressed in style B (moderate) was judged to be significantly more stimulating than the male dressed in style A (informal). The female teacher, on the other hand, was scored as more stimulating when dressed in style A (informal) than style B (moderate). In both cases the teacher dressed in style C (formal) was perceived as the least stimulating of the three, though for the male this difference was not significant.

Table XV

Mean Scores of Students' Perceptions from  
the Five-Point Rating Scale for the  
Characteristic "Stimulating"

Teacher Sex	Dress Style A	Dress Style B	Dress Style C
M	$\bar{x}=3.20$	$\bar{x}=3.66$	$\bar{x}=2.86$
F	$\bar{x}=3.76$	$\bar{x}=3.16$	$\bar{x}=2.44$

As shown in Table XVI, the difference between mean scores was significant for all comparisons except that between the male dressed in style A (informal) and the male in style C (informal).

Table XVI

Values of t for Differences Between Means of  
Dependent Samples for the Characteristic  
"Stimulating"

Teacher Sex	AC	P	AB	P	BC	P
M	n.s.d.		-2.68	.05	4.87	.001
F	6.93	<.001	3.83	<.001	4.52	<.001

Discussion. Perhaps the most formally dressed teacher received the lowest scores for this characteristic because students felt that the life style of the style C (formal) teacher was least like their own, and hence he or she would be least likely to be able to provide meaningful examples }

relevant to the students' lives.

Well-prepared for class

As shown in Table XVII, the pattern of results is the same for both male and female teachers. Those who dressed in style C (formal) were judged to be most well-prepared for class, those who dressed in style B (moderate) were next, and those dressed in style A (informal) received the lowest scores for this characteristic.

Table XVII

Mean Scores of Students' Perceptions from the Five-Point Rating Scale for the Characteristic "Well-prepared for class"

Teacher Sex	Dress Style A	Dress Style B	Dress Style C
M	$\bar{x}=2.78$	$\bar{x}=3.90$	$\bar{x}=4.38$
F	$\bar{x}=2.90$	$\bar{x}=3.64$	$\bar{x}=4.04$

As is indicated in Table XVIII, the difference between mean scores was significant for every comparison.

Table XVIII

Values of t for Differences Between Means of  
Dependent Samples for the Characteristic  
"Well-prepared for class"

Teacher Sex	AC	P	AB	P	BC	P
M	-10.78	<.001	-7.32	<.001	-4.17	<.001
F	-7.17	<.001	-6.51	<.001	-3.13	<.01

Discussion. Perhaps the students felt that a teacher dressed in style C (formal) would be more likely to take his job very seriously and consequently would spend more time in preparation for class. In addition, style C (formal) would seem to connote an older teacher who, by virtue of his years of experience teaching the material, might appear better prepared for class than a newer and younger teacher.

Clear

As is shown in Table XIX, both male and female teachers dressed in style B (moderate) received the highest scores for this characteristic.

Table XIX

Mean Scores of Students' Perceptions from  
the Five-Point Rating Scale for the  
Characteristic "Clear"

Teacher Sex	Dress Style A	Dress Style B	Dress Style C
M	$\bar{x}=3.28$	$\bar{x}=3.96$	$\bar{x}=3.36$
F	$\bar{x}=3.26$	$\bar{x}=3.56$	$\bar{x}=3.48$

As may be seen in Table XX, of the ten characteristics which were employed in this investigation, this one produced the fewest significant differences between mean scores.

Table XX

Values of *t* for Differences Between Means of  
Dependent Samples for the Characteristic  
"Clear"

Teacher Sex	AC	P	AB	P	BC	P
M	n.s.d.		-3.49	<.01	3.36	<.01
F	n.s.d.		-2.39	<.05	n.s.d.	

Discussion. The reasons why the moderately dressed teachers were judged to be most clear are not apparent. Perhaps teachers dressed in style A (informal) suffered on this trait because they were perceived to be least organized, knowledgable, and well-prepared for class. Similarly, teachers dressed in style C (formal) may not have scored well here.

because they were felt to be least able to provide examples which are relevant to the students' own lives.

The differences which were obtained for this characteristic are less significant than those which were obtained for the other characteristic. This may be seen to suggest that dress is less important as a determinant of student perceptions for this characteristic than for the others.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

### Conclusions

Question 1. and Question 2. inquired whether students' reports of their perceptions of the characteristics of male and female teachers were significantly affected by the teachers' style of dress. The results of this study suggest that both questions can be answered affirmatively.

This investigation sought to determine which of ten perceived teacher characteristics could be affected by dress. It was found that, for both males and females, for every single characteristic changes in clothing alone produced a significant difference in scores between at least two of the various styles.

In response to the questions, it is therefore concluded that teachers' dress does exert some influence upon students' perceptions of teachers' characteristics.

Question 3. inquired whether style of dress seems to exert its influence similarly for male and female teachers. Based on the finding of this study the answer to this question appears, by and large, to be affirmative.

For the characteristic "sympathetic toward students' problems"; teachers, whether male or female, were judged most positively for style A (informal), then style B (moderate), and then style C (formal).

For the characteristic "knowledgable" teachers, whether male or female, were rated highest in style C (formal), then style B (moderate), then style A (informal).

Both male and female teachers were perceived to be least "enthusiastic" when dressed in style C (formal).

For the characteristic "friendly" male and female teachers were rated most positively when dressed in style A (informal), then style B (moderate), then style C (formal).

With regard to the characteristic "flexible" both male and female teachers were rated highest in style A (informal), then style B (moderate), then style C (formal).

Male and female teachers were perceived to be most "organized" when dressed in style C (formal), then style B (moderate), then style A (informal).

Both male and female teachers were judged to be least "stimulating" when dressed in style C (formal). This characteristic, however, also produced the only significant difference between the rankings of males and females. The male teacher dressed in style B (moderate) was judged to be significantly more "stimulating" than when dressed in style A (informal). On the other hand, the female was perceived as significantly more "stimulating" in style A (informal) than style B (moderate).

For the characteristic "well-prepared for class" both male and female teachers scored highest when dressed in style C (informal), then style B (moderate), then style A (informal).

Finally, for the tenth and last characteristic "clear" both male and female teachers scored highest when dressed in style B (moderate).

Question 4. asked whether one of the three dress styles influences students' perceptions most favorably. The answer to this question is not a simple one. No one style of dress emerges as most favorable overall. Instead, various styles of dress cause more positive ratings in terms of some characteristics and less positive ratings in terms of other characteristics. For example, if a teacher chooses to dress in an extremely informal style he or she would seemingly enhance the probability of being perceived as sympathetic, friendly, and flexible, while simultaneously decreasing the probability of being perceived as well organized and well-prepared.

It is therefore not possible to recommend a particular style of dress for all teachers. Rather, individual teachers might determine what sort of image they would prefer to project, and may then use this information in an attempt to enhance the probability of achieving that desired image. For example, a teacher who normally dresses very formally, and whose students perceive of her as being unfriendly, might decide that she would like her students to think of her as being more friendly. Based on the results of this study, one could suggest to this woman that dressing in a less formal style is one of the strategies available to her.

Question 5. asked whether particular styles of dress seem to be related to different perceptions of teachers' characteristics. The results of this investigation suggest that the answer is affirmative. A male teacher who dresses very informally would seemingly enhance the probability that he would be perceived as sympathetic toward students' problems, friendly, and flexible. The male teacher, when dressed in the moderate style was judged to be most stimulating and clear. The most formally dressed male teacher was perceived to be most knowledgable, organized, and well-prepared for class.

The female teacher who dressed very informally was perceived as very fair, sympathetic toward students' problems, enthusiastic, friendly, flexible, and stimulating. The female teacher when moderately dressed was judged to be most clear.

Finally, the female teacher, when dressed in the most formal style, was thought to be well organized and well-prepared for class.

### IMPLICATIONS

The questions which this study sought to answer grew out of a conversation during which a new graduate assistant asked whether teachers' dress had any impact upon students. What can we now tell this fellow and others like him?

First, the results of this study indicate that students ascribe different personality characteristics to teachers based upon the teachers' styles of dress. Teachers' dress does have some impact.

Second, students' perceptions of the extent to which a teacher possesses various characteristics seem to vary as that teacher is seen in different styles of dress. If he chooses to come to class dressed in jeans and a casual shirt, all other things being equal, he will increase the probability of being perceived as friendly, flexible and sympathetic, while simultaneously decreasing the probability of being perceived as knowledgable, organized, and well-prepared. The reverse of this is likely to occur should he decide to come to class dressed in a suit and a tie.

Third, no one style of dress can be recommended for all teachers. One reason for this stems from the fact that we do not yet understand the ways in which perceptions of dress interact with other variables. Another reason is that different styles of dress facilitate the achievement of different interpersonal goals. Therefore, while it may be possible to make an intelligent choice of dress for a particular circumstance or a particular group of students, there is no best choice to cover all situations.

We now have some information which allows us to make predictions concerning the potential effects of teachers' dress. It's gross, but the results of this study ought to encourage us to probe more deeply.

Table of Mean Scores and Standard Deviations  
of Students' Perceptions from the Five-Point Rating Scale

Characteristic	Teacher Sex	Dress Style A		Dress Style B		Dress Style C	
		$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD
Fair	M	3.42	.88	3.50	.91	2.80	.78
	F	3.52	.70	2.92	.78	2.56	.73
Sympathetic toward students' problems	M	3.88	1.08	3.40	.86	2.74	.99
	F	3.80	.93	3.28	.95	2.60	.67
Knowledgable	M	3.18	.92	3.84	.74	4.28	.82
	F	3.14	.76	3.70	.76	3.78	.86
Enthusiastic	M	3.60	1.20	3.68	.77	2.92	1.03
	F	3.96	1.03	3.30	1.02	2.66	.82
Friendly	M	4.06	.93	3.72	.86	2.72	.76
	F	4.16	.71	3.42	.86	2.74	.85
Flexible	M	4.10	1.13	3.42	.78	2.54	1.03
	F	4.12	.92	3.16	.77	2.46	.81
Organized	M	2.64	.90	3.82	.75	4.40	.81
	F	2.70	.79	3.76	.66	4.10	.76
Stimulating	M	3.20	1.05	3.66	.80	2.86	1.14
	F	3.76	.98	3.16	.79	2.44	.84
Well-prepared for class	M	2.78	.84	3.90	.84	4.38	.78
	F	2.90	.81	3.64	.69	4.04	.90
Clear	M	3.28	1.13	3.96	.88	3.36	1.06
	F	3.26	.69	3.56	.84	3.48	.99

## APPENDIX

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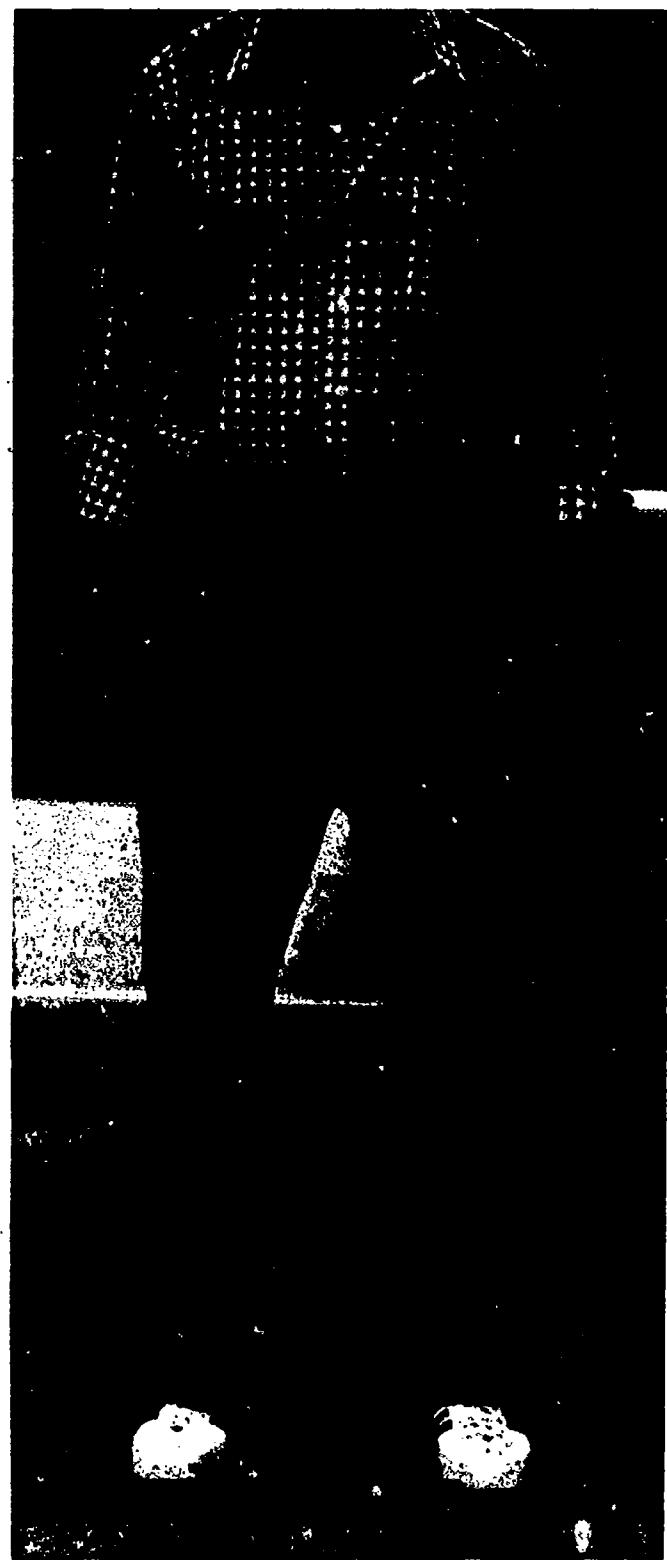
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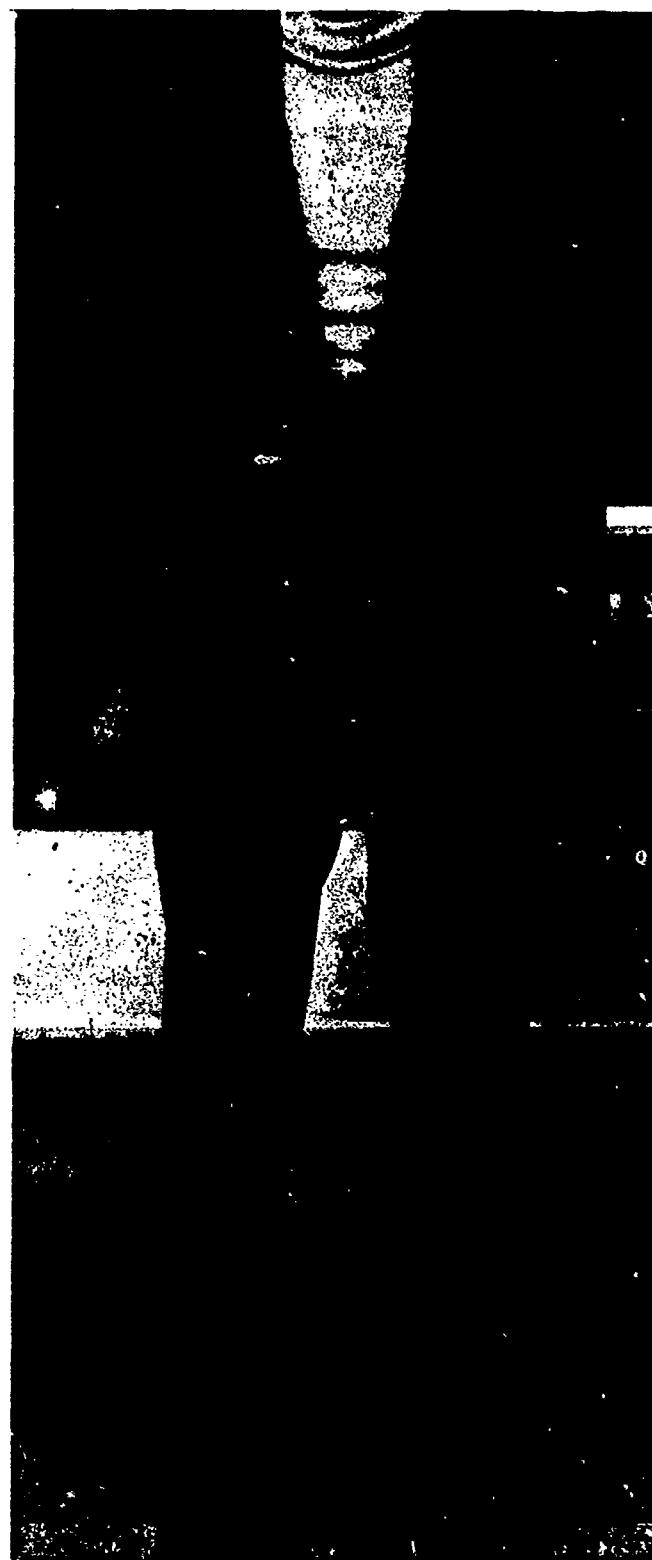
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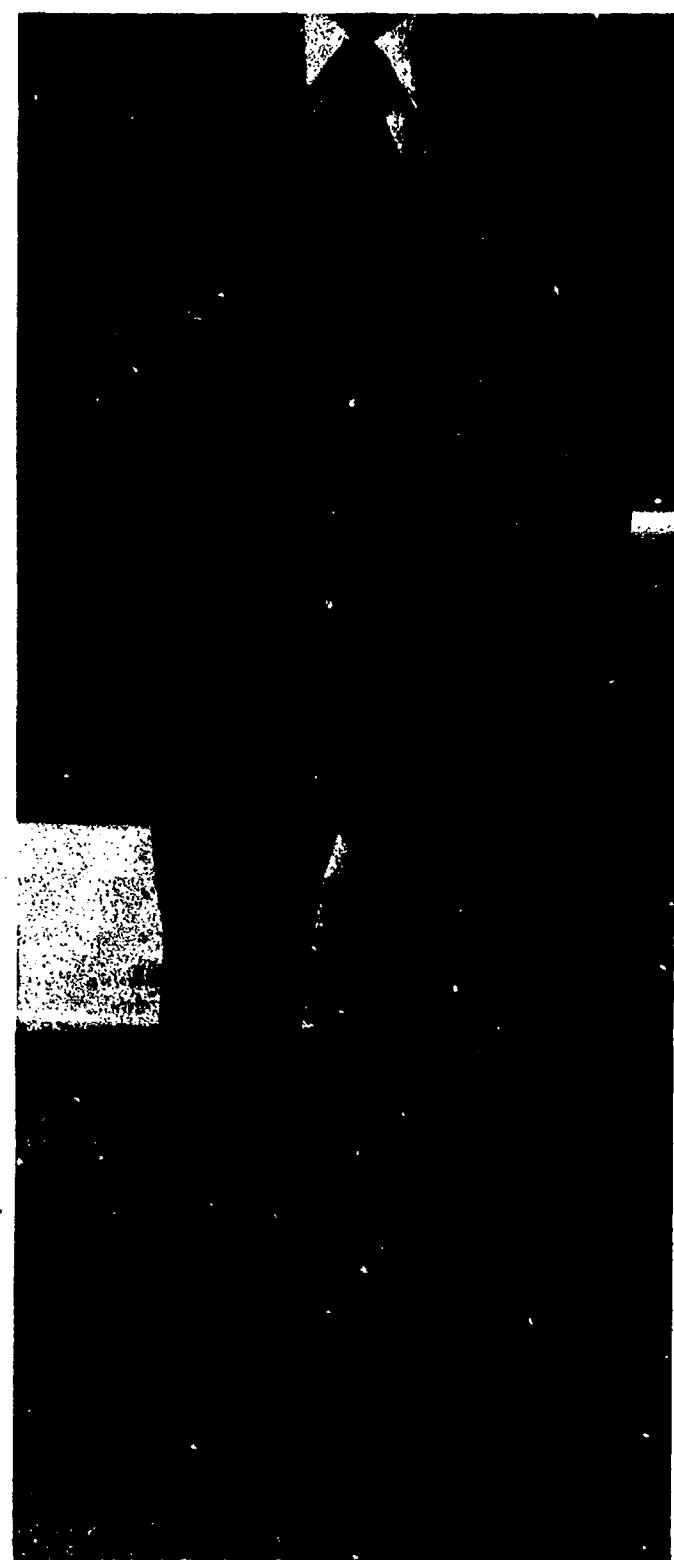
## APPENDIX



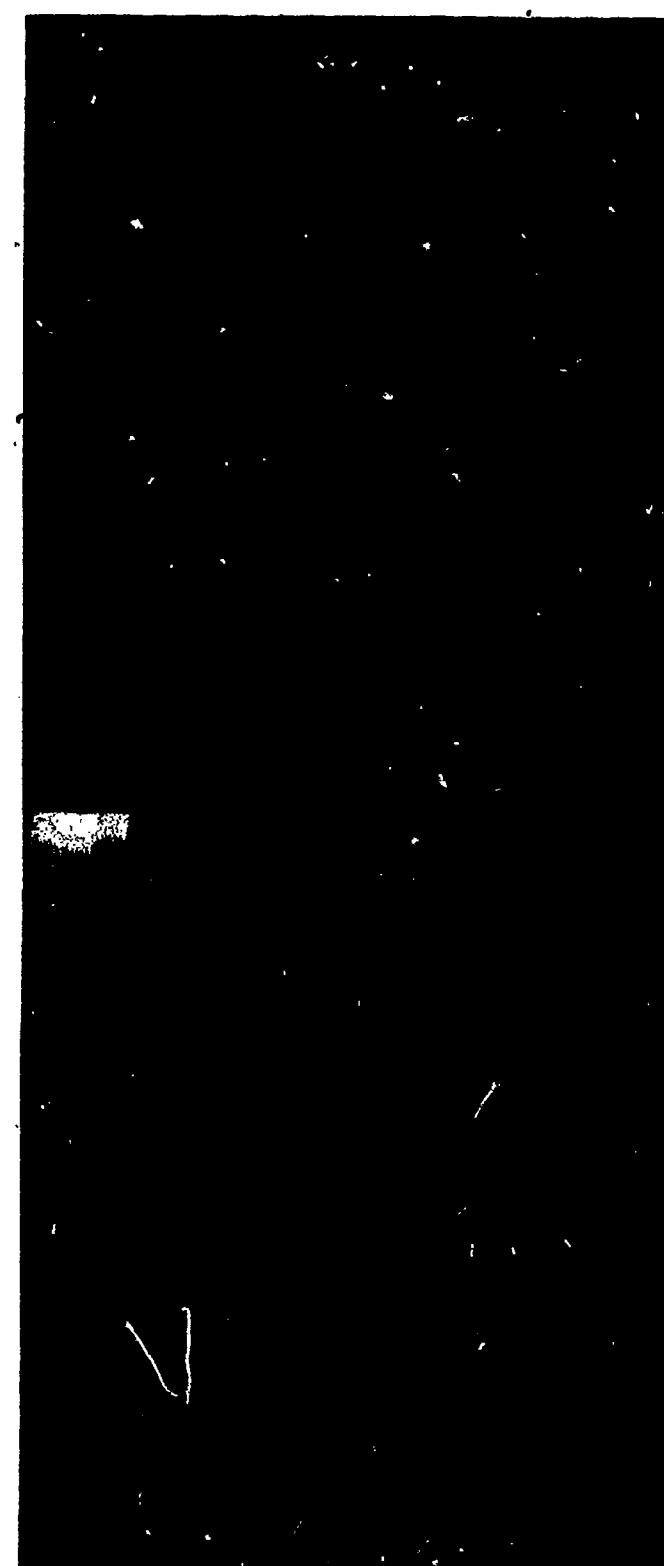
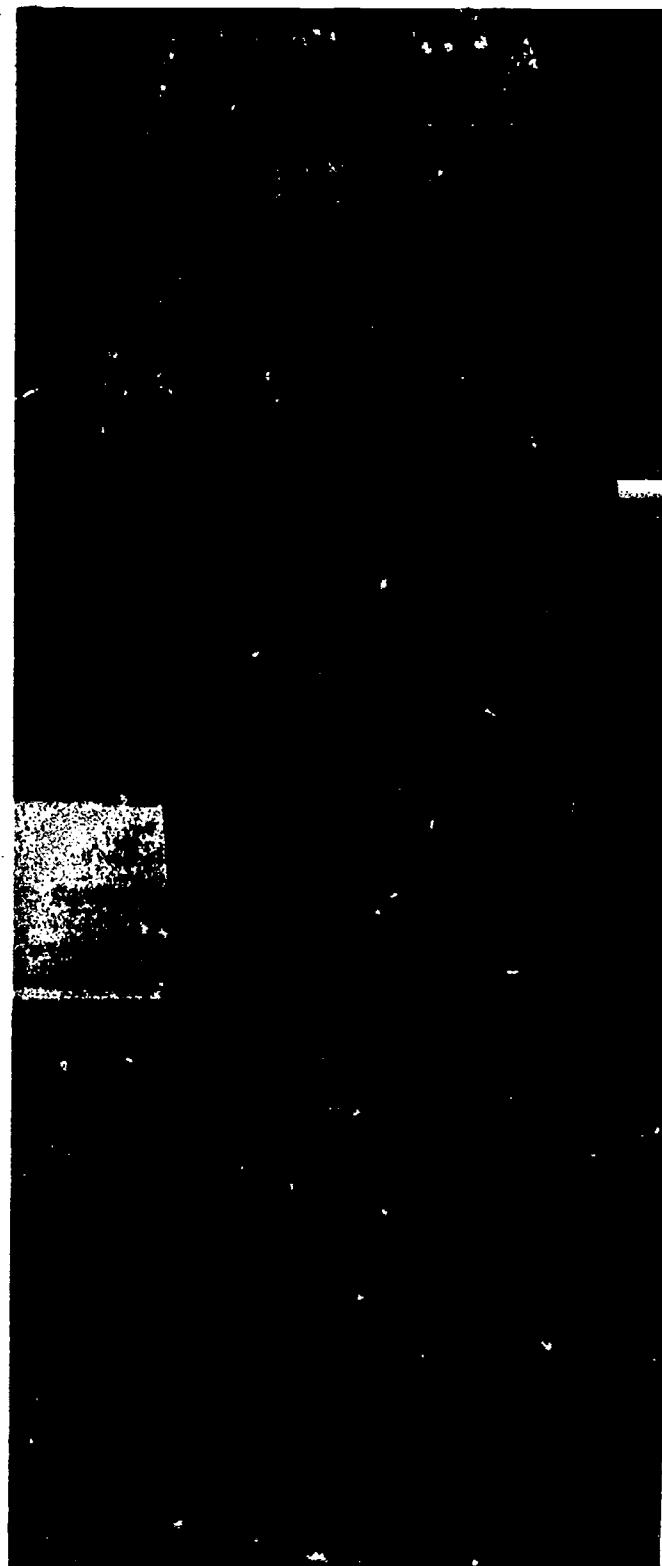
**A**



**B**



**C**



**A**

37

**B**

38

**C**